



Taking Diversity and Inclusion to the Next Level

## **Arlington Police Department: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Climate Assessment**

FINAL REPORT – March 10, 2020

Submitted by Dr. Michelle Holmes and Doug Weinstock, VISIONS Inc. Consultants

### **INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW:**

VISIONS, Inc. was asked to conduct an assessment of the diversity, equity, and inclusion experiences and the cultural climate within the Arlington Police Department – both internally and in relation to the community. The impetus for this arose in the aftermath of the highly controversial published comments (late 2018) by an APD officer and a 2019 letter that was signed and presented to the Select Board from several hundred Arlington residents (and reportedly a significant number of non-residents as well). Acting (at the time) Chief Flaherty thought that this assessment could be beneficial for the organization in its commitment to improving working relationships with each other and with the community members served by the APD.

Five one-hour focus groups, as well as a couple of individual interviews, were conducted in early January by VISIONS consultants Michelle Holmes and Doug Weinstock with groups ranging from 3 to 9 participants in each. Groups were held for patrol officers (3 groups-- 2 male, 1 female), ranking officers, and civilian staff.

Participants were asked about:

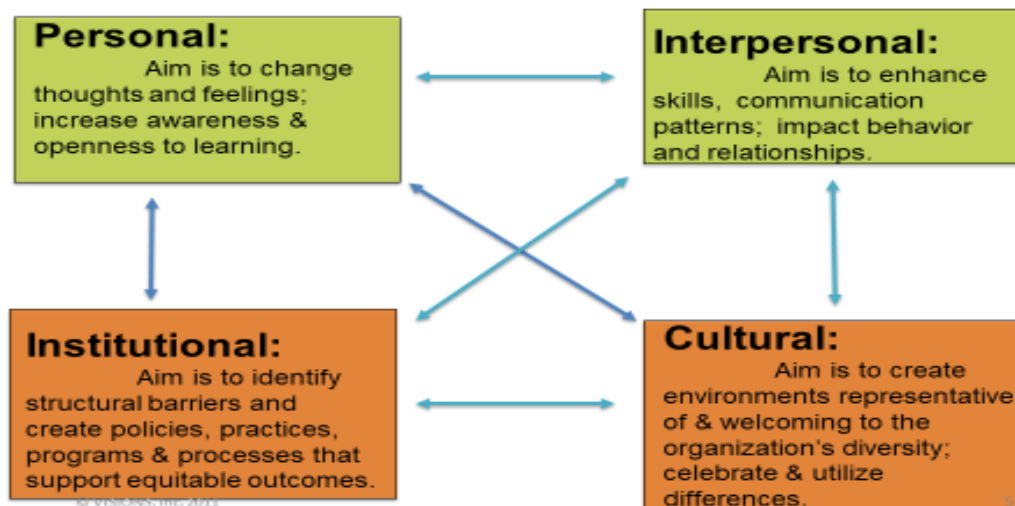
- Diversity and Inclusion SUCCESSES both inside APD and in community relations
- Diversity and Inclusion CHALLENGES both inside APD and in community relations

A total of 38 participants (out of approximately 90 employees) took part in the assessment process. Half of these attended the report-out sessions in early March in which the perceptions, experiences, and recommendations in the qualitative assessment were presented, and feedback and priorities for action were sought.

Additionally, the assessment included a document review of Department policies, procedures and practices through a diversity and inclusion lens. Strengths and recommendations for changes/updates were provided. This was presented in a separate report to Chief Flaherty.

This report summarizes themes and significant comments that were garnered from the various focus groups (and interviews). They, as well as VISIONS recommendations, are analyzed using VISIONS' Levels of Oppression and Change Framework.

## Levels of Oppression and Change



This framework indicates that the inequities associated with each dimension of difference (race/ethnicity, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, etc.) are created and sustained at often interlocking levels in U.S. society and in organizations. For meaningful change to take place, it must occur at all 4 levels.

We first note some ASSESSMENT LIMITATIONS and then an extensive FINDINGS section. This is followed by RECOMMENDATIONS from employees and additional VISIONS' RECOMMENDATIONS for next steps for enhancing the department's diversity and inclusion efforts and commitment (internally and in relation to the community). We conclude with ANALYSIS and IMPRESSIONS and some thoughts on moving forward.

Appreciation goes to Chief Julie Flaherty for what she did– with support from some others in the department - in terms of interfacing and coordinating with VISIONS and arranging scheduling and other logistics. Appreciation is also extended to those who participated in the assessment process.

### ASSESSMENT LIMITATIONS:

- The 38 participants may not reflect the full range of experiences and opinion within APD. (And we believe the report likely reflects the experience and opinion of the majority.)

- Some group participants said more than others; some group participants may have been reluctant to state their perspectives and ideas.
- The assessment specifically focused on experiences and views of APD members; we did not have input from other stakeholders and entities (e.g. Select Board, town commissions, residents).
- The “culture” of police departments (having each other’s backs, putting aside differences when in the line of duty, etc.) may make it harder/less safe for some members of the department to express criticism or concern about the actions of a fellow member.

### **ASSESSMENT FINDINGS:**

-In response to an initial question posed about “*what comes to mind when hearing the terms “diversity”, “equity”, “inclusion”?*”, there were varied responses, with limited amount of differentiation between the terms.

### **IA- Community Relations,**

#### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Successes:**

#### **Institutional and Cultural Levels**

- Daily “park and walks”
- Community Outreach and Events
  - Citizen’s Police Academy
  - Pizza in the park
  - Youth programs (Operation Success, summer camp, children’s fitness and bikes, movie nights to be implemented at schools)
  - Veterans breakfasts/Visiting retirement home
  - Participation in other community events
- Training about transgender people; asking about pronouns
- Translation of some forms on APD website into Spanish and Chinese
- Increasing respect for female officers
  - inclusion was a lot harder for us “back in the old days” (“people thought I was a crossing guard and not a police officer”)
  - 5 women officers currently on the force- and some on the list

#### **Personal and Interpersonal Levels**

- Increasing respect for female officers
  - attitude towards women in uniform has become more positive (people “see my uniform first”)
- Increasing comfort with diversity in community
  - I think the APD is “accepting and aware of what is going on in the community”

- racial profiling doesn't happen (if stop vehicle "don't see race of person" until close to them)
- Expressions of appreciation by some community members
  - 95% of the public values us
  - Non-verbal – thumbs up, wave when pass by
  - "thank you for your service"; person who'd had bad experience previously saying "you're totally different"); bring kids into station

## ***IB- Community Relations,***

### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Challenges:**

#### **Institutional and Cultural Levels**

- Negative impacts of the controversial comments last year
  - People "accuse the whole department for what one person does"
  - There will be "bad apples" and it gets applied to many; entire department painted by "a broad brush" because of one act;
  - It is tough when the community "put the scarlet letter on a guy when he makes a human mistake"
  - Sadness that "20 years of good grace has gotten thrown out"; our reputation is "tarnished" and we are seen as "racist"
- Town Manager, Select Board seen as not backing police, while listening disproportionately to "vocal minority" along with input from previous APD Chief
- Incomplete (biased?) media reporting
  - There has been no correction of misinformation in media. (e.g., annual earnings reported don't reflect the number of hours officers worked in a year and our salaries are not higher than for Brookline.)
  - Social media brings out the few disgruntled voices; continuation of controversy "driven by social media"
- Negative broader society view of police
  - Not a good time for law enforcement, views of police ebbs and flows (Vietnam War protests vs. after 9/11 and Boston Marathon bombing vs. Ferguson, Baltimore, etc.)
  - Police represent "the man"; some have narrative that police are "animals"
  - If one "bad officer" someplace, "we all get labeled, but community expects us not to stereotype them"

#### **Personal and Interpersonal Levels**

- Lack of respect for police officers
  - Changed since event last year (and fed by social media)
  - People "accuse the whole department for what one person does"; gets applied to many

- Community members – argue, “question us”, challenge everything; “don't understand what we do” (e.g. “It's my job to sit in the park and watch it – doesn't mean something bad is happening”)
- “It's challenging to have to defend the police department; when people say stuff and you say “that's not right” they don't understand what an individual officer can change”

## **IIA- Internal to APD**

### **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Successes**

#### **Institutional and Cultural Levels**

- Enthusiasm about appointment of Acting Chief and new management approaches that promote DEI:
  - Welcoming attitude for Julie Flaherty and sense of hope
  - Acting chief “cares about us”; more “consideration” to people's feelings now (Civilian employees' group)
  - Morale went “through the roof” when announcement came out about J. Flaherty appointment (Civilian employees' group)
  - Accessibility of Chief Flaherty; openness within APD  
*(note: assessment interviews were conducted prior to February appointment of Flaherty to permanent role as Chief)*
- Increasing diversity among officers and civilians
  - Five women officers and some on the list
  - Lots of diversity among dispatchers
  - Patrol officers come from different backgrounds (e.g. education level, other careers)
- New attention to language around gender in communications
  - Changed terminology from “patrolmen” to “patrol officer”
  - In writing, refer to Chief as “he/she”
- Responsive to generational change *(note: also see Challenges below)*
  - Increasing number of younger employees
  - Department is listening more to younger officers

#### **Personal and Interpersonal Levels**

- Supportive relationships among officers across lines of difference
  - There are no longer issues in recent years of males not coming to “back up” female officer; or white officers not coming to back up officer of color
  - Old, young, ethnic groups, religions, male, female get along well
  - Even if don't like each other, at work we are willing to lay down our lives for each other. We are “a family”

—

–We all “pretty much get along. Our shared experience “creates a bond beyond race, religion”

- Lack of overt discrimination

- I don’t see diversity and inclusion as a problem in the department

- Overt* sexism doesn’t happen here anymore, especially since males and females have trained together in the Academy

- I have not seen sexual or racial bias in my years at APD

## **IIB- Internal to APD**

### **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Challenges**

#### **Institutional and Cultural Levels**

- Need for increased officer diversity

- “I want more diverse hires for police officers”

- There should be more female officers

- Need for increased attention to inclusion

- Our agency needs to find more ways to create an inclusive work setting

- Increasing diversity and inclusion is limited by constraints posed by Civil Service procedures and residency requirements

- Hiring process limits diversity among officers

- Separation among APD as a result of two unions

- Lack of clear consensus on definition and application of “diversity, equity, and inclusion”

#### **Personal and Interpersonal Levels**

- Generational conflicts (*see also SUCCESES above*)

- There are disconnects between supervisors from the tail end of “old school” group and some younger police officers who don’t think their opinions are taken seriously

- Some younger officers viewed as not having “as strong a work ethic” (re: overtime, “bad shifts”, holidays)

- More senior people can “stick it to the younger people” (e.g. undesirable shifts)

## **EMPLOYEE RECOMMENDATIONS to Enhance Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

### **Community:**

1. Town leadership should share more data about APD achievements (such as the 8 years of data showing “no differential treatment”; no use of excessive force complaints in 5 years), and focus less on “reassuring” or “pandering” to the more extreme members of the public
2. Community should not be involved in decisions regarding APD if they don’t know what police go through
3. Create a hot line if persons are afraid to come forward and anonymously report on about concerns and investigations
4. Interact more with members of the community
5. Let the community know that APD is there for them, not dependent on “whether you like us or not.”

### **Internal to APD**

1. Create opportunities for the department to get together more often, beyond just union events
2. Complete last steps of Restorative Justice process
3. Increase diversity (racial/ethnic, gender) in the APD

## **VISIONS RECOMMENDATIONS to Enhance Diversity, Equity and Inclusion**

*(note: these are provided for the APD to consider and prioritize, short-term and long-term, and are not listed in any priority order from our perspective; while presented by level, there is overlap among the levels)*

### **PERSONAL/INTERPERSONAL LEVELS**

1. Encourage APD members to continuously enhance their capacity to work with persons from groups different from their own.  
(This involves understanding personal beliefs, biases, attitudes they hold that can impact interactions with people across difference; accepting that no one can “know it all”; that this is an ongoing process.)
2. If/when a community member indicates to a APD member that they are aware of a resident who is afraid or reluctant to come forth directly to the police about their concern, explore with community member what might enable the fearful person to feel safer doing so, and how the first person might act as a conduit.

### **INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL**

1. Consider a Diversity and Inclusion position (or make it part of a current community relations position) to serve as liaison to community groups such as Human Rights Commission, Rainbow Coalition, etc.



- 
2. Expand Civilian Police Academy participation by more Arlington residents of varied backgrounds. Offer more ride-alongs separate from the Academy.
  3. Explore avenues for hiring a more diverse police force, including what it would mean (pros and cons) to do so outside Civil Service procedures.
  4. Develop clear guidelines/behavioral expectations and discipline policy related to expression of personal opinions in the public domain.
  5. Review/update Policy and Procedures documents that were reviewed (listed in addendum) by VISIONS consultant using a diversity and inclusion/multicultural lens, and see comments therein related to APD practice (strengths and recommendations in a separate document).
  6. Continue the plan for publicizing (website, otherwise) more APD Policies and Procedures documents, or parts thereof.
  7. Chief publicize/report periodically (via website? local media?) about what's been happening related to APD activities and interactions with the community (and perhaps some internally).
  8. Consider whether to (re)institute any data collection that reflects the actions of APD.
  9. Consider translation of additional APD forms on website.

#### CULTURAL LEVEL

1. At the conclusion of each Civilian Police Academy cohort, gather written feedback/information from participants (e.g. "what you learned about the role of APD that you hadn't been aware of previously?"; "what stereotypes or assumptions were dispelled by your experience?", etc.) that can be publicized.
2. While there is reportedly no indication of OVERT manifestations of sexism or racism within the department, it is important that any employee who feels discomfort around subtle comments or actions related to race, gender, age, role, etc. be permitted and encouraged to raise their concern without fear of retribution (see Town's "Non-Discrimination Policy and Policy Against Harassment").

#### **ANALYSIS AND IMPRESSIONS:**

-The information shared by members of APD in assessment interviews was powerful and significant in portraying their experience in their professional roles in the aftermath of the incident related to the writings of Lt. Pedrini. (As stated by one officer – and which might apply to others - they were prepared for the physical dangers they could face as police officers; they were not prepared for the assault upon their reputation).

-What many in the APD are feeling in terms of being labeled or viewed based on the actions of a few "bad apples" parallels the prevalent experience of many in marginalized groups (people of color, women, non-Christians, people who are LGBTQ+, people with



physical/emotional/cognitive disabilities, low income people, immigrants, etc.) who have lived with such stereotyping and perceptions (plus systemic discrimination) based on their group memberships.

-There is a cost or liability that comes from being in positions of power institutionally as members of law enforcement. This includes a burden of responsibility in terms of expressing personal views that can have a negative and frightening impact, especially for members of historically marginalized groups.

This may be challenging for some in APD to understand and accept when feeling misunderstood, devalued, or vilified - locally and/or nationally (e.g. #ACAB). As one participant in the focus groups reflected, “we are held to higher standard than the public – but I guess we should be”.

-Among those who attended the report-out/feedback sessions on this report in its “preliminary” status, there was general agreement that what was included reflected the range of positive and negative perceptions and experiences within APD and in relation to the community. They were given the opportunity to indicate their individual priorities among the recommendations from their peers and from VISIONS. These were provided to Chief Flaherty to provide input/guidance moving ahead.

### **SUMMARY and thoughts about MOVING FORWARD:**

There has been much controversy in Arlington in the aftermath of Lt. Pedrini’s written opinions and the disciplinary process that ensued. While this has caused fear and pain to many in the community, it has also been hurtful and dispiriting to many members of APD, who perceive that they have lost the trust of the community (while also realizing that, in reality, it is a small vocal percentage). Both “sides” have the opportunity to learn from this experience, if willing and interested in trying to understand each other as individuals and group members. And, there will be some at the far end of the spectrum who are not likely to be interested in this, as it may challenge some long-held beliefs and perceptions. Members of APD would benefit by understanding how they are viewed institutionally in positions of power and control, even as they may individually not feel powerful, especially at this time.

The essential process of “healing” and coming to better understand and appreciate each other (APD and community members) is likely to take a long time and require a certain amount of “grace” and forgiveness on the part of many.

We were interested that several of the APD officers present at the report-out/feedback sessions indicated interest in having structured opportunities to meet with members of the community who are interested in engaging with APD for sharing and learning more about each other’s’ perceptions/experiences. Some were

concerned about whether this would be productive, dependent on which community members attended. We believe that the way in which such meetings are facilitated (including clear purpose and expectations) is an essential factor in potential success.

Hopefully the words of Terrence Cunningham, former Wellesley Police Chief, from the IACP Annual conference in fall 2016 can be helpful moving forward:

*“I would like to take a moment to address a significant and fundamental issue confronting our profession, particularly within the United States. Clearly, this is a challenging time for policing. Events over the past several years have caused many to question the actions of our officers and has tragically undermined the trust that the public must and should have in their police departments. At times such as this, it is our role as leaders to assess the situation and take the steps necessary to move forward.”*

He continued during his talk to reference “darker periods” of policing history and said: *“For our part, the first step in this process is for law enforcement and the IACP to acknowledge and apologize for the actions of the past and the role that our profession has played in society’s historical mistreatment of communities of color.*

*At the same time, those who denounce the police must also acknowledge that today’s officers are not to blame for the injustices of the past. If either side in this debate fails to acknowledge these fundamental truths, we will be unlikely to move past them.”*

VISIONS would be happy to discuss ways in which we could support the process of healing and “bridging the gap” between APD and the community moving forward. This could include helping those who comprise the APD enhance their understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion issues at the personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural levels.

#### ADDENDUM:

#### **APD Policy and Procedure Documents reviewed with diversity/equity/inclusion “lens”**

(separate report submitted, listing “Strengths” and “Recommendations to Consider”)

- 1- Bias-Based Profiling
- 2- Interacting with Transgender Individuals
- 3- Federal Immigration Laws
- 4- Serving People with Mental Illness
- 5- Non-Discrimination Policy and Policy Against Harassment (town policy)